

THE
SOUL'S PROGRESS
AND OTHER POEMS

LOUIS V. LEDOUX

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AND OTHER POEMS



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THE
SOUL'S PROGRESS

And Other Poems

BY

LOUIS V. LEDOUX

AUTHOR OF "SONGS FROM THE SILENT LAND"

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To

GEORGE EDWARD WOODBERRY

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PROLOGUE

PROLOGUE

TO GEORGE EDWARD WOODBERRY

THE quest of Beauty through illusion's world,
And Love, of Beauty born, that homing died, —
Familiar themes — with youthful voice I sing;
Not emulous in aught of singers dead,
Nor yet of him whose music rises now
In strains immortal as the soul of song.
In humbleness before the voiceful dead
I stand, and here of him who, singing, lives,
I claim the privilege of discipleship.

Not mine the genius surging full at flood,
In foaming waves that Freedom's passion bear,
To break in music on a Nation's heart,
Till patriot beacons blaze from coast to coast;
Nor mine the strength to reach that mountain
 crest

Which looks, prophetic, toward the dawning age,
And in the paling of night's weakest star,
And in the first faint herald of the east
Hails day, that soon the valleys, wrapped in mist
And dreaming not of any light to come,
Shall wake from life potential, slumber bound,
To life that builds the master-work of God.
Nor yet of these great gifts the third is mine :
To look serenely up the human stream
With vision backward turned and thoughtful eyes,
That gazing steadfast toward its limpid source,
Now lost to sight beyond the haze of years,
Can mark a constant progress in its flow,
By swirl and eddy, round opposèd rocks,
Till sweeping past that crumbling ledge of time
To which we cling, it moves with hidden course,
Toward cloud-hung coasts and seas whose
 freighted breath
Far inland wafting, wakes, as fragrance found
In love-saved flowers, after love has died,
A sense of incompleteness, lack, or loss.
Not such my theme ! My song is from a heart
That tracking orbèd Beauty through the world
With ardor undismayed, self-consecrate

To follow where the quest may lead, though
 strange
And perilous the pathway be, but finds
Illusive gleams, ineffable desire.

Surely I stood erect, ere birth had bound
My broken being to the wheel of change,
And gazed, clear-eyed, on Beauty absolute;
For unappeasèd yearnings haunt my mind —
Like Love's remembrance of a vanished face,
And shadowy presences about me move
Which brand me, lips and brow, with wands of fire
That bearing Beauty's signet through the world
I no oblivion find, nor any peace.
Surely I stood erect and met her gaze;
Her voice I heard, — the speech was music's self.
Ah then I recked not that a time would come,
When, creeping prostrate through the dust of life,
Back from the strange deformities of sense,
My soul, unwinged, would breathe petition vain
To hear the distant passing of her feet,
To kneel far-off and gaze with doubtful eyes
On vague suggestions of her loveliness;
Yet now I wander like an erring child

That follows firefly gleams afar from home,
Wayworn and hesitant, with circling steps.

And this the lot of Beauty's chosen priests :
In cloistral twilight redolent of prayer,
To feel the poisoned arrow burning deep,
Forevermore, within the wound she gives ;
To question earth and ocean, air and life,
For aught of balm to ease the ancient pain ;
To worship whatsoe'er partakes of her, —
Now half revealèd in a maiden's eyes,
Now glimpsed in moonlight paling toward the
day,

Now heard in cataract or thunder crash.
But shadows these : her presence still they miss.
A light revolving on the shores of dream,
An instant seen and then a night-time gone —
On hidden shores, whose doubtful port is death,
So Beauty seems ; and they the mariners
Who tossing evermore on tideless seas,
Hand-bound and impotent, with straining eyes,
But drink a further madness from the sight.
As joy that fades ere yet surprise be dead
So Beauty fades, or as, on quiet waves,

Across the silver highway of the moon,
A cloud-built island passes — swift as dream —
Her shadow passes by. Unsatisfied
With human joys or touch of human hands,
They follow her they love throughout the world,
But clasp, like Pan of eld, at last a reed.
And doubts arise, but clear the answer rings:
Devoid of visioned Beauty what were life?

Again I turn to him whose surer song
Far generations yet unborn shall heed;
For now, with toiling steps, I onward climb
Toward where, far up amid the glaciers lone,
His music blooms — the edelweiss of song,
The spirit's chant of passion's purity.
To him I turn, my master, poet, friend,
And beg of him this boon of long desire —
To lay my hillside blossoms at his feet.

THE SOUL'S PROGRESS

PREFACE

ONE of the most important phases of the soul's progress toward a realization of itself has seemed to me to be its passage from the thoughtless optimism of youth, through the valley of the shadow, to that higher optimism which, having seen and triumphed over the evils of life, differs from its earlier form about as does virtue from innocence.

The intensity with which one feels any of the later gradations in this sequence is directly proportionate to the vividness of the earlier experiences; to some, about whom "the light that never was on sea or land" has shone with unusual clearness, the descent into the darkness of doubt — sudden as it usually is — is doubly bitter.

The boy accepts Beauty¹ passively, as a matter of course, and assumes, except in the case of one nurtured in sorrow, that pillars of cloud and of fire will always be present to guide him toward that promised land which, he thinks, cannot after all be so much fairer than the world wherein he dwells. Then the youth, with the fervor of spring in his heart and the freshness of morning in his eyes, feels the passion of Beauty, and, if he be especially susceptible to Nature's charm, he sees her loveliness as the complement of the glory of life, and sings in word or action his hymn of joy. Later, in the midst of his ecstasy, he feels the stealthy approach of doubt, which comes to him disguised alluringly as broader knowledge or manhood's experience, and gains access either through contact with the positive evils of life or in the

¹ Here let it be clearly understood that in the following pages the word *Beauty* is not generally used in its ordinary sense of "that which is pleasing to the eye," but is usually given that philosophic meaning in which Beauty, Goodness, and Truth are the same in essence. *Beauty* in this sense, and disregarding the Platonic conception of Absolute Beauty, might perhaps be defined as that which is present of the infinite in the finite.

thoughts of those who have learned in the school of suffering to feel

“the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world.”

The “white radiance” of noon, that grew from the delicate hopefulness of dawn, sinks suddenly into a tropic twilight, and the soul is left “lone-wandering through the night,” filled with the bitterness of disillusion, sorrowing for lost ideals and for that perfect faith in the omnipresence of Beauty which, in their passing, take with them youth with its untried confidence in life. But the night has its stars, and happy is he who, seeing them, feels their unalterable calm and gains an appreciation of life’s fundamental loveliness.

There is a distinct difference between purely intellectual conceptions and those that are coloured by feeling; for instance, the idea of Deity, arrived at by the reasoning faculty of the mind alone, is apt to be much less anthropomorphic than the conception of God into which an emotional element enters. While complete differentiation of the two is, of course, impossible,

the attempt has yet been made to distinguish, in a way, between them.

The progress of the soul through the realm of emotion is here represented (Part I) in a series of lyrics, which, disregarding all else, present merely the moods characteristic of particular periods. It may possibly be as well to state that there were considerable intervals between the times of writing the various lyrics, and that they were composed without any realization that they would form a sequence. The second part is, on the other hand, a conscious attempt to trace, with continuity and with regard for cause and effect, the intellectual growth of the soul from the mental attitude of boyhood to its higher optimism.

It is my conviction that any spiritual experience, such as that herein portrayed, while true in all its details to one alone, will yet, through the general kinship of humanity, be partially true to all; and, in the belief that art loses value in whatever measure it deviates from complete sincerity, I have tried to describe the experiences as accurately as possible, introducing only such

slight alterations as are essential to all artistic representation.

English poetry is full of allusions to the vision and its passing, and there are many references to the soul's return from the winter of its discontent to a lingering Indian summer of mellower youthfulness. Some, however, have never passed beyond the second stage; they have become bewildered in cloud-filled valleys and have seen, only in rare and sunnier moments, the tranquil peaks for which they ever look longingly, but whose summits they may never attain.

Yet the experiences of life come to each one of us afresh, as unaging dawn comes to each new day; and so I too have attempted to express the moods and the thoughts of the soul in its progress.

LOUIS V. LEDOUX.

"SKYRIE"
October 22, 1906.

THE SOUL'S PROGRESS

PART I

BOYHOOD

"The dream I dreamed, but waking could not live"

I STAND on the shore of a stormless sea,
With Hope's young eyes in wonder wide,
And watch the sun-swept ripples glide
From dreaming haze of eternity.

The ocean is kind, for the wavelets play
With smile and shimmer about my feet,
And scatter benediction sweet
In drops of silent-falling spray.

The wind is still; the deep is calm;
My soul looks down through the visioned
years
And finds no presage of grief or tears,
For the sea will cradle my bark from harm.

YOUTH

"God must be glad one loves His world so much"

I SING the joy of the wind-swept woods,
The joy of the sunlit sky,
The joy of the solemn solitudes
Where the stars burn clear on high;

For life is a joyous song of Love,
Of Beauty and Delight,
And human souls in cadence move
With the hymn of noon and night.

I sing with the winds, the stars and sun,
As the world rolls on its way,
A song of cosmic joy, begun
At the birth of night and day;

For life is a perfect symphony
With God and His world in tune,
And I feel the vibrant harmony
Of the pulsing days of June.

THE COMING OF DOUBT

"O Norns, is the heart of a boy God's lie?"

ALONE with Nature on a joyous day,

We wandered through the forest, loving all
The wondrous beauty of the youthful May,
And gloried in the Spring. We heard the
call

Of birds that sang their rippling notes of love,
Full-throated, chanting praise to God above

We saw the orchids — yellow, red, and white —
Agleam in purple shade of dusky pines;
And ferns that sway in woven forest light,
Cradled in vales where languorous day re-
clines;

While 'gainst the grey of lichen'd cliffs on high,
The laurel showed, as clouds in dawn's dim sky.

The sense of Beauty thrilled us, till we saw
Naught but effulgent, rapturous Beauty;
heard

And felt but Beauty only. All the law
Of life was summed in Beauty. Like a bird
The world sang pæans rich with pure delight,
And gave no presage of the coming night.

We spoke of Beauty — how it wrapped us
round, —

Of how the world was fair, and life was sweet;
How God was love; and every softest sound

A note in Nature's harmony complete.
And then a joyous bird began to sing,
That life was one transcendent, pulsing Spring.

When sunlight slanted from the western glow,
The ecstasy of Nature hushed our hearts
To voiceless adoration: soon the slow,
Soft twilight shadows lengthened, and the
darts

Of darkness rustled through the drowsy trees,
And spirit voices stole along the breeze.

Then falt'ringly our thought was framed in
speech,

And all the hopes and all the dreams of youth
Were voiced in low yet fervent words; for each
Was starting on the long life-search for truth,
And each had seen a vision in the way,
And each was young as eager-hearted May.

But softly down the wind a whisper stole,
And woke remembrance of the warning cry
Of those who knew this Springtime of the soul,
Yet found it sadly wane and pass and die.
They saw the light of Beauty slowly fail,
Enwrapped in shrouding darkness — veil on
veil.

I cried: "They say this glory soon must fade,
For Life will seize us with relentless hand

And screen the vivid light with folding shade;
That all the realm of Beauty is a land
Of dreams and visions doomed to pass away,
And not God's prophecy of endless day."

But through the twilight came her answer clear:

"It cannot be that this is all a dream!
It is too wonderful, and God is here.

Yet should it prove a transient, fading gleam
Before the dark, and hope be found a lie,
I pray that dreaming ever, we may die!"

So, musing, passed we through the forest dim,
While evening spread the quiet glades with
dew,

And saw, far up the East, a lustrous rim
Of gold upon a mountain top, and knew
A Beauty purer far than sunlit May,
And murmured: "Night may fairer prove than
day!"

THE DEATH OF YOUTH

"I wake from day-dreams to this real night"

FROM sweet illusion waked in sudden night,
I saw Life's evil throng,
No longer masked in semblance of delight; —
Hypocrisy and wrong,
With all their loathsome kin, — and Youth, that
clung
To young ideals, to bitter words was stung:

"Has Life naught else but these repulsive
shapes,
So seeming fair without,
So foul and false within? What soul escapes,
Surrounded by such rout,

From loss of Love and Gladness, Hope and
Youth?

Is Life but disillusion? evil, truth?"

Then Youth grew faint among the ghastly
forms,

Which mocking, pressed more near,
And cried: "Behold in us the naked norms
Of Life; behold and fear,

For nevermore shall Beauty's swift surprise
Transform the world before thy startled eyes."

"The Law of Life," they shrieked, "is bitter
doom;

And man must bear its yoke."

But Hope that sank through solitudes of gloom,
In lingering anguish spoke:

"I should not yet deny my early dream,
Would one sure light amid Life's darkness
gleam."

A pause; and Hope, from ebb resurging,
strove

To see in Life some light;
But still no single ray of Beauty clove
The universal night.

In all the world I saw but strife and pride,
With shams of faith; and Youth, despairing,
died.

IN EXILE

"If this were life, thou wouldst not hear me crying"

AN exile in the city pent,
To me a glimpse of heaven is sent; —
A dash of blue, a drifting cloud; —
And while around me, clamouring loud,
Is restless strife of careworn men,
I steal away in dreams, and then
I hear the robins carolling,
Where maple, oak, and chestnut swing
Their branches with the boisterous sweep
Of boyish winds that down the steep
Declivities of mountains leap.
Unheedful of the city's roar,
I live the life I lived of yore,
In which the mind, with Heaven content,
Found Heaven's every beauty blent

Within itself, till song of breeze,
The flowers' sweetness, fields, and trees
Established one complete control,
In harmony of part with whole,
Throughout the young harmonious soul.

Alone I pace the crowded street
And watch the thousands that I meet,
Till on me comes a tide of pity
For all the anguish of the city,
That surges up to God, unspoken,
From hearts whose trust in Him is broken,
Yet dumbly seek some certain token,
To show He heeds their silent pain.
The thousands pass and come again;
Each hasteful, restless, on they race,
And graven deep on every face
By hard, remorseless, constant strife,
The condemnation of the life
Is writ.

How long, O Lord, how long
Wilt thou permit the perfect song
Of life that should be, thus to wail
Through minor tones, and dying, fail
In discord utterly? How long,
O Lord, how long must grief and wrong
Compel a thoughtful worker here,
Who feels the city's burthen near
His own heart ache, to sink away
Within himself, lest pity's sway
Too strong should prove, and drag its prey
Afar from possibility
Of peace? Yet this alone to me
Brings restful calm; for when I yearn
Too ardently to soothe the stern
Realities of pain that burn
The helpless hearts of men, I turn
The sad thought inward, sinking deep
From dream to dream, till pity sleep
And calm be found.

A glint of blue

Between the house-tops, all the view
Of ample Heaven I need. A cloud
That shades the glaring street; the crowd
Is all forgot; the din is hushed;
The restless eyes that by me rushed
Haste on unseen. Ah, could I show
To others that sweet path I go
To where — through memory's aid — I lie
And watch the tranquil, spacious sky,
In half unconscious bliss of mere
Existence! Swallows dart and veer
In zigzag flight, and fragrant grass
Waves round me, while slow shadows pass
From flower to flower, till twilight's charm
Brings cool beneficence of calm.

THE HIGHER OPTIMISM

"Beauty abides, nor suffers mortal change"

HIGH on a mountain where the rugged trees
Clung sturdily, I heard the crooning breeze
Whisper its silver-sounding slumber song
Among the cliffs, and o'er the valleys long,
Where drowsy leaves were nodding dreamy-
wise.

I saw, far up the deep, eternal skies,
The summer clouds which slumbrous steal
athwart

The sun, till ruffian, clamorous winds distort
Their shape, and make them fade and pass —
like men.

The vision thrilled me; for my soul till then
Had been throughout a stretch of darkened days,
Bound in the thralling bondage of the ways

Of cities, where the clanging notes of strife,
Discordant, voice our fever-fitful life.

Into my soul the glowing ^{SP}irit Beauty crept,
And stirred my senses which so long had slept,

Callous and cold, as winter still and hoary, —

Till now the fair transcendent summer's glory

Enwrapped my being like a lustral fire,

And tuned me to such music as ^athe choir

Of clear-eyed angels chant in chorus there,

Where perfect harmony is perfect prayer.

And now my spirit's lyre, from silence long,

By God's own fingers waked to sudden song,

Breathed tremulous, through every eager string

The very melodies the seraphs sing.

I felt the love of God around me flow, —

Changeless, effulgent, through me burn and
glow,

And seemed to rise above the things of earth,

Pure as the moonbeams at the dawn's pale birth.

Before my eyes, in vision were unrolled

0742
The scrolls of all the ages myriad-fold;
The gates of Life and Death were opened
 wide,
That I might see the surging human tide,
Instinct with hopes of Heaven and dread of
 Hell,
Which, as its crested billows, breaking, fell,
Cast whirling up the crags of stolid Fate
The scattered surf of mortal love and hate.
Yet sadness there was none, for on my thought
Of all the ways that human souls are bought
For gold or dross or shadows of a dream,
There burst, like moonlight on a darkling
 stream, *CDIL*
The glow of Beauty, poised with sheltering
 wings,
Caressingly above the world which sings
Its hymn of wondrous rapture, while the spheres,
Through æons of the numberless long years,
Keep time and tune in magical mute song.

The moving spell of Beauty grew more strong ;
While still throughout my quivering being
wound

The sense of summer's blended light and
sound.

Like fleeting mist before unchanging hills,
I saw the universal gloom that fills
Our usual sight ; within, beyond, above . . .
Its transitory cloud-rose steadfast Love.

In joyous vision, Life I saw complete, —
A unity, whose differing parts, replete
With hidden usage, build the perfect whole,
That waits unseen within the dormant soul.
For like a mighty symphony is Life,
Whence many voices rise that seem at strife ; —
We play with unskilled hands our single part ;
We hear the happy melodies that start
In beauty, cease unsung, while eager themes
In discord die. No plan or form there seems,

For heeding not the rest we play, each one
Alone; and ere we have with toil begun
To know the whole, we die. Yet God who
wrote

The score, can hear how every separate note
Fulfil an end; how themes that break in pain
Are caught by other instruments, and gain
At last completion, blending, ere they cease,
In harmony of woven chords of peace.

And then the spell of Beauty, working still,
Transformed my every sense, my thought, my
will,

To ecstasy. I knew no other life
But that of soul, and all the brutal strife,
The grief, the pain, seemed dim and far away.
Entranced I stood until the lyric day
Drew down toward tranquil twilight. One clear
star,

Alone 'mid seas of orange fervour, far

Within the West was gleaming; golden bright
It shone above the purple hills; then light
Burst forth from clouds that opening — fold on
fold —

Disclosed unfathomed depths of burning gold;
And from their central heart came darting rays,
Which spread diffused in trembling yellow haze
Among the cliffs; in undulating lines
They came, and crowned the peaks and cresting
pines
With aureoles.

At length the western flame
Grew pale, and floating up the mountain came
The soft, enfolding shadows. Evening's breeze
Caressed the valley's gently waving trees;
The birds were rocked to sleep, then, one by one,
The timid stars peeped out, and day was done.

PART II

THE COURSE

FROM exile in the glooms of thought returned,
I sing the progress of the soul — through sweet,
Unclouded meadows ever warm with sun,
Down shadow-haunted marshes dim with mist,
To open uplands where the thrushes call ;
Where darkness only comes to grow more fair
Than day, and, awed with subtler beauty, pass
Through gently watching night to eager dawn.
For not till then the soul, with broader view,
And calm initiate eyes that much have seen,
Beholds life's quiet meads and deserts lone ;
Its mountains, valleys, brooks, engulfing seas,
With sense of due perspective, seeing how
The parts combined create the landscape's full
Completion. Youth, that lives secure in dreams,
With Beauty void of change, unknowing pain,

Uplifts to fair, imaginary forms
The incomplete, disjointed parts of life.
The soul creates the light wherein it moves;
And also gloom is born within the soul;
For Nature holds her Fate-appointed way,
In one part steeped in Beauty, and in one
A senseless monster, dealing senseless doom;
And we, who see the dark side or the bright,
Deduce her fulness from our partial ken.
So youth, which sees the brightness only, builds
Therefrom its perfect world, expressing thus
Itself. Youth's mind, unclosing like a bud,
Beneath the freshness of the morning dew,
Lies open only to the cheerful sun;
The shades of night pass over it unseen,
Unfelt, and thought of seldom. All the pain
With which the flinching world is charged, it
deems
But mere illusion, born of men purblind,
Who cannot see life's Beauty, or have erred

In following out the pathway clearly marked,
That leads from bowers of early innocence
To twilight rest embosomed safe in peace —
The day accomplished and its journey done.
And there seems perfect calm a little while,
A tranquil watch beneath the kindly stars,
And then new life, with other happiness ;
For man in faith is nurtured, or he finds
A trust in God and Life the dower of youth.

How often, when in boyhood's days I stood
Upon a mountain top among the pines,
And saw the dreaming world below me
spread, —

The various green of cedar, oak, and birch ;
A lake of silver burnished by the sun ;
A homestead here and there that nestled
close

To kindly earth, — and saw the spacious sky,
The tranquil depth in depth of blue, the clouds

With cooling showers laden, and perceived
The solemn Beauty of God's handiwork,
I knew a speechless reverence passing prayer,
A bond of kinship with infinity !
And sometimes lesser things awoke this sense :
An elm with branches like a fountain's curve
Arrested in its fall ; a rainbow's sheen,
That shimmered through a drifting smoke of
 spray,
Brought swift communion with the Substance
 dim
That they, its shadows real, made manifest.
As one within a darkened room may feel
The silent presence of a friend unseen,
So I intensely felt that God, though hid,
Was close indeed, My trustful thought flowed
 on
To Him — unformulate, for Him in me
I found ; and I myself — the sunlit world,
The glory and the loveliness of life,

Seemed parts of Him—the sum and source
of all.

The world of sense His pregnant symbol
seemed;

A metaphor of Him whose vital breath
Did permeate its every pore, who lived
In Nature, veiled as life and love and light,
That Man, with mortal eyes, might see the truth.
Then through the symbol fair I passed toward
Him

In whom it had its being, lived and moved,
Till all this firm, obtrusive universe
Grew half unreal. I lived within the soul
That lives in all things, and I saw naught else
On life's horizon. God was far more near
Than things of sense. With thought intent on
Him,

I moved through years, ignoring death and
change.

Around, within me, throbbing Beauty burned.
The days and nights with rapture grew intense,
And life was one ecstatic hymn of joy, —
A summer rich in comradeship with God.

At length upon my eyes, with glory blind,
Stole gradual shade. I saw the rule of pain; —
That all things kill to live, and slaying die; —
And yet I felt it not. Within my sight
Was life's unrest, but I, aloof, looked on,
And vaguely thought through lyric words to
lift
Men's stooping minds till they should know the
white
Sublimity that shone about me still.

As one who sleeps, yet thinks himself awake,
Will pass with sudden start from dream to
truth,
So they who dream that life is wholly good,

By disillusion sharp are rudely waked,
To face, off-guard, the stern reality.
Like lightning striking swift from cloudless skies,
The disillusion comes, transforming life
To desolate immensities of waste,
Where Good lies slain, and Evil rules alone.
For with the death of youth the soul will swing
From joy to gloom, and he whose joy was most,
Will swing most far, with greatest impetus,
Nor turn at once toward central equipoise.
And thus it was with me. My voice, that oft
Had sounded rapturous notes, grew harsh with
 pain ;
For God was lost, with faith and joyous youth.
All nature seemed at heart impassive law,
That down the ages moved without intent,
Propelled by eyeless Chance, or eyeless Fate,
Unsparring man, ignoring good and ill.
I saw how men in urgent conflict strive,
With greed ignoble and insatiate,

Like soulless beasts, to seize another's prey.

I saw deserving poor unjustly doomed ;

The rich forgetting all but place and gold,

With cant of charity and monstrous pride.

I saw how maidens, dreaming girlish dreams,

Whom chivalry itself scarce dared approach,

Were given up, in all their purity,

To men with eager eyes and ruthless hands,

Who soiled the cherished body, stained the soul,

And turned all trust in life — all faith and

hope —

To slow, consuming agony of hate.

Heartsick with horror, then I turned away,

Though here and there true love serenely

burned,

With light reproachful in the general gloom.

I saw religion oft defiled with sham,

And churches thronged with thoughtless crowds,

who came

For custom and convention — shamming faith;
And some, of leading place, arch-hypocrites,
Whose paid pretence of real approach to
God,

Through use of vacant forms but half believed,
And wholly void of felt significance,
Seemed worse than open scoffs — more blas-
phemous.

I saw that most whose early, cloudless faith
Remained intact through grown experience,
Were those who lived in simple thoughtless-
ness —

Accepting custom's teaching, questioning not,
Nor feeling life's abysmal mystery.

And then from all the realms of ruling pain —
From Man and Nature — came a voice that
cried:

*Could God have made this Malebolge of woe,
This gloomy pit, this sink of shams and death?*

*Could God have given Man the power to yearn,
And then decreed his yearning ever vain?*

In anguish rose the cosmic cry once more;
From every nook where life could lurk, it
rose:

*If God has made it all, what God is He
Whose thought devised, whose laws allow such
life?*

Then sick with grief and scorn, I vainly sought
For calm forgetfulness, therein to rest.

As youth, with mind intent on present joy,
Has vague perception of existent woe,
But sees it only as a passing cloud,
That scarcely dims the brightness of the sun;
So, after darkness closes round the soul,
When chill miasmic mists enfold its core,
There comes a consciousness, obscurely felt,
That past the shrouding gloom is light unseen.
And thus it came to me: Life's bitterness

Oppressed my every thought — was all I felt
Or saw or knew; and yet a sense profound
Of other truth existed.

All the while

I pondered those who spoke of Life and God:
The dreamer Plato, crowned with morning
light;
The Buddha, seeking mystic, deep repose;
The voice of self-found manhood — Emerson;
The surly Schopenhauer; Haeckel too,
Whose grovelling system robs the world of
Soul;
And him who, wandering through “tremendous
night,”
Saw Life as blank despair, with grief supreme.¹
Then them I followed who, panentheists,
Taught God transcendent, immanent — the soul
Of all — in all, and yet above — the whole;

¹ James Thomson, the Younger.

For theirs had been my own instinctive faith,
That died, accounting not for present pain.
But one alone I found whose doctrine seemed
To reach the very kernel, pass the husk, —
The singer Shelley, pure in heart, sincere ;
Whose self surpassed its shadowing deed and
 song.

And this the truth he spoke, with constant voice :
Philosophy, religion, thought must fail ;
We cannot solve Life's primal mystery, —
Its cause, its sequence, reason, end, or use ;
Yet love exists as man's immortal hope.
There lives a soul in all things that through
 love,
Works toward a far, millennial reign, and
 builds,
Eternity of joy, o'ercoming Fate.

And once in later time, a rapture came —
A trance of exaltation, unforeseen.

I sat in silence through a starry night,
And watched the moon its golden radiance
 shed

Across a river's darkly rolling tide,
When suddenly the bonds of earth seemed
 loosed;

I felt myself divided — soul from sense;
The baser part in swoon seemed laid behind —
I almost feared to look and see it there.

The soul in sudden purity went out, —
An exile seeking home. From earth it passed,
Toward some far other clime of fairer skies;
But as an exile feeble, old, and worn
With long vicissitude, who staggers on
Until he sees the land of long desire,
And stretches trembling hands to touch its
 earth,

May fall at last before the boundary —
My soul approached what seemed a dreamed-of
 home,

And yearned to rest within its tranquil vales ;
But found it walled with beetling cliffs around,
With cliffs impassable and barriers strong,
That baffle one weighed down with aught of
earth,

And yield to him alone an entrance who,
Life's latest bonds unloosed, is simply soul.
In vain it strove to reach the silent land ;
The clinging earthly fetters held it back ;
Past earth, and entering not to heaven, it sank
O'ercome. Then slowly usual life returned ;
The differing parts that make the normal self
Were interfused once more, and naught was
left

Of this experience but memory,
And sheer exhaustion — body, soul, and mind.

And this confirmed the truth that Shelley
taught ;—

There is a soul in each that blindly gropes

Through darkness here awhile, in bonds confined ;

But yet a soul (a something far beyond
The sense ; we call it "soul," or what we will),
Transcendent, immanent, immortal. Past
All pain and change and death it lives secure ;
Yet man can scarcely pierce with mortal sight
The thick, enfolding clouds that wrap it round.
We only see it gain with sudden gleam
A moment's vantage o'er surrounding dark,
But trust its light, inconstant now, is charged
With prophecy of constant light to come.

At length, from hiding dust of forms and
creeds,

Secure from them who bear yet soil his name,
I saw emerge the pale, brave Christ, thorn-
crowned,

With pleading eyes, and heart that deeply
yearned

To lighten life with hope and tender love.
Through Him, supplanting scorn, sweet pity
 came,
Her gentle eyes suffused with ready tears,
Her hands divinely stretched toward human
 pain,
With love like dawn, that grows from one faint
 spot
Of grey, and reaches out through flushing
 clouds,
Until the whole drear world awakes to light.

I strove to bring some joy to careworn men,
And turn their haunted eyes toward restful
 Truth.

Throughout emotion's realm, in former words,
I traced the progress of the circling soul,
In long circumference from faith to faith;

But here with intellect — not heart — I speak
The complement, whose growth accomplished,
 makes
The full-orbed sphere of Thought and Feeling
 — both
Secure in trust, that past obscuring mists
The Soul's unchanging mountains rise serene.

EPILOGUE

*Though human hearts with grief and anguish
Must still be darkened day by day,
Though youth must pass and beauty languish,
Though joy must yield to sorrow's sway,*

*Though hope grows dim and faith uncertain,
Though reaching thought forever fails
To see, beyond death's dusky curtain,
The mystery no search unveils,*

*Shall I not heed what gleams of Beauty
Through Man and Nature surely shine?
Shall I neglect the certain duty
Of bringing joy to them that pine?*

*Our life is like a shadowed valley, —
The somber clouds above it fold ;
But here and there the sunbeams rally ;
They touch it here and there with gold.*

*In hearts by laughing joy neglected,
In hearts by clinging grief oppressed,
In nook and corner least expected
There Beauty waits, an alkahest*

*Dissolving life from combination
Of matter, spirit, soul and sense,
That soul appears in sublimation,
Above its alloy dark and dense.*

*So let me live, all Beauty seeing,
To lighten life where'er I can,
And mark the soul's immortal being
Impearled within the mortal man.*

TO —

As bards of eld to cherished maids did bring
Those amaranths of poesy and prayer,
Whose music-woven coronals they wear,
Forevermore engarlanded with Spring;
So I, with later songs, for you shall wring
From dying years immortal youth, and dare
The slow, defeating ages to impair
Your loveliness. Full-voiced of you I sing,
And singing, lead you to that storied land
Of meadows starred with fadeless passion-
flowers,
Where Beatrice, Emilia, Stella stand
With girlhood in their eyes; while hand in
hand,
Iseult and Deidrê roam through blissful bowers,
Absorbed in dreams of Love's remembered
hours.

TO PHYLLIS

WHEN thou dost leave thy wattled cote,
E'en silly sheep are sore bested ;
Then how could I play reed or oat
Amid the fields whence thou art fled? —
O thou, my joy's sole livelihood !

I could not heed the throstle's song,
Nor mark the garish woods bedight
With cardinal flowers. The groves among,
O Phyllis ! think what woful wight
Were Corydon, in hapless plight.

Along the river's flowery strand
Pale purple orchises, unseen,
Amid the meadows lush would stand,
While I, distraught, with teen and threne
 ewailed the Shepherd's vanished Queen.

The pastoral life would lose its charm,
Its fabled force the country air ;
E'en Cynthia's beams could bring no balm
To Corydon, wert thou not there,
Phyllis, the country life to share.

THE HILL OF PINES

STRETCHED out beneath a mountain pine,
I watch the mottled woods below;
The distant hills their clear-cut line
Through soft October sunlight show.

A busy sparrow hurries by,
And now a hawk above me veers —
Grey wings against an azure sky; —
A droning bee about me steers.

This nodding little bluebell seems
A vagrant bit of Heaven furled;
The nestling lake like diamond gleams,
Its sapphire calm in ripples curled.

I see the light on hill and plain,
I see the sky's resplendent blue,
But all my thought turns back again
To other days fulfilled with you.

You shared my love of flower and field;
Your comradeship to Nature brought
A deeper joy than she can yield
To me bereft of answering thought.

About the hills a memory clings,
It haunts the forest's rustling ways;—
The doubled pleasure sharing brings
I miss these clear October days.

DIRGE FOR LOVE

No more the moonless nights enchant
Our hearts, till life with beauty thrills;
No more our souls, awakened, pant
To break earth's bonds recalcitrant;
No more for us the dawn fulfils
Night's hope above the dreaming hills.

No more ! No more ! for love is dead, —
Young love, the child, to Heaven returned, —
Young love that made the dawns so red,
And through imperfect Nature shed
Such light, untainted beauty burned
Before our souls that upward yearned.

No more I sing the Spirit's song, —
By love uplifted, sphere on sphere ;

With blatant voice of human wrong
I sing; yet still I dumbly long
To breathe dawn-music, trilling clear
Through love's intensive atmosphere.

In night I see but night alone;
In dawn unrest that leads to day;
At noon I hear the bitter moan
Of life, whose myriad tongues intone
A litany to laws that they,
With love's lamented dreams, obey.

Young love is dead. The lonely hours
Bring each its dread increase of doom;
About love's grave thick darkness lours;
And there life's penitential flowers
Death-sweet, revive in endless bloom,
For life's horizon is love's tomb.

LONELINESS

LET me come back a little while,
 In friendship's name,
To touch your hand, to see you smile,
 As when I came
Each day, and found your welcome still the same,
Through younger, happier years, in friendship's
 name.

I do not ask for lavish June,
 With Spring full-grown,
Nor yet for hopeful May ; my boon
 Is this alone :
To find one breath of Spring through Winter
 blown !
Shall not love's death for all love's faults atone ?

You cannot all forget how love,
 With wondering eyes
But newly opened, looked above,
 Saw sudden skies,
And gazed a moment, awed with vague surprise,
Then reached a tiny hand for paradise.

Can you forget how love, the child,
 With stammering speech,
So many laughing hours beguiled
 In strife to teach
His unused tongue those perfect words that reach
The sense, but faltered timidly on each?

Alas, I cannot all forget
 How love that grew
More wonderful each day, ere yet
 His childhood knew
Its own omnipotence, swift lightning slew,
And left this void immensity ; can you ?

I ask not much ;— but leave to sit

With you again,

Beside a fire your hands have lit,

And hear the rain

Outside, or watch with you how hill and plain

In morning brighten. Must I ask in vain?

Let me come back a little while,

In friendship's name,

To touch your hand, to see you smile,

As when I came

With love that smouldered toward a birth of
flame,

Through younger, happier years, in friendship's
name.

LOVE'S HOMING

As a bird returns to its nest
I come to thee ;
From the mocking world's unrest
Thou savest me :

All else is dark, a night
Of storm and strife ;
I come to thee for light,
For love, for life.

THE TOPIARIST

As tender trees are bent until they grow
In strange unnatural shapes, so we who prate
Of freedom, all our thwarted lives must show
The stringent bending of our gardener — Fate.

LOVE'S IMPOTENCE

To watch a woman's face grow old
 From helpless day to day ;
To see increasing anguish mould
 Its hardening lines ; to pray
In blind attempt to bend unbending steel,
Is bitterness that death alone can heal.

Yet love that sees each deepening line
 Resistless griefs engrave ;
Yet love that finds no anodyne,
 No hope, no means to save, —
A wave that breaks on Fate's unheeding
 shore, —
For very impotence but loves the more.

LIFE

IN youth I saw her beauty shine
 Undimmed by clouds of gathering gloom ;
I saw her rise serene, divine
 Above man's woe, defying doom.

Then whirling tempests gathered fast ;
 I felt the storm-wind's rending breath ;
A lightning flash — I saw aghast
 That Life was but a form of Death :

Life but a form of Death, where change
 Is lord ; where Youth and Beauty wail
And fade away, transformed to strange
 Disfigured shapes ; and burning pale

Upon the front of Life, I saw
The brand of pain. Then old and sear
She passed, obeying Nature's law,
And in her stead stood Death, austere.

THE BETTER PART

IF faith be possible, to rest in faith,
Child-hearted, safe, — with shelt'ring gentle arms
 Beneath, above; no wraith
 Of doubt, no wild alarms
To fright the soul that dreams toward endless
 bliss, — is best;
And some in shelt'ring arms of faith securely
 rest.

If doubt be strong, then live in honest doubt;
Not seeking others' lucid faith to change,
 But bravely working out
 Within their ample range,
The chances manifold of this most certain life,
With opportunities for action, courage rife.

To stand in manly tenderness is good, —

With ready pity touching many lives, —

And save for solitude

The idle grief that rives

The heart. Can life express itself in better way

Than off'ring unexpected kindness day by day?

What need of searching how or whence or why?

We have this life to make of what we will;

And yet we weakly cry,

“ Behold, Fate thwarts us still ! ”

We can but ponder thwarting Fate, yet are we

free

Within our mortal limits noble, base to be.

THE STRANGER

A LONELY stranger wandering back,
He seeks a scene of long ago ;
His feet the well-remembered track
Retrace with heavy steps and slow.

He finds the nestling garden spot
That love made sacred long ago ;
The garden paths have altered not,
Unchanged the stately cedars grow.

The same encircling hills look down
Through moonlit haze as long ago ;
And still their shadowy masses crown
The garden view, in graceful bow.

A few late sprays of heliotrope, —
 So fair it flowered ! O, long ago ! —
And down the gentle southern slope
 The last October roses blow.

Some dusky asters dark with night;
 (How dark is grief for long ago !)
The yellow-centred cosmos, white,
 Before him glimmers, row on row.

The autumn moon is watching, calm,
 As oft it watched so long ago ;
But her who gave the night its charm
 No more the moonlit alleys know.

In other days he lightly came,
 (How different now from long ago !)
To touch her hand ; to breathe her name,
 (The name he gave her) breathing low.

He lingers near an ancient dial

That marked love's hours of long ago ;

So swift their stream ! — a little while —

The sluggish hours but scarcely flow.

He dreams a moment love unchanged

Awaits him there as long ago ;

But from the paths where lovers ranged

He turns alone. Ah, bitter woe !

THE LAST SYMPHONY

A Monologue

THE fire is sinking, Alice, like my life ;
A little moving of the wood will make
The one flame up again ; but I, — no more.
There was a time when you could make me
 glow
With life and love and inspiration ; now
I wait for death ; yes, glad to find him near.
I only want to rest a little while
With you, and talk. How strange ! — we two
 again
Sit hand in hand, and all the vacant years
Of utter loneliness seem scarcely real.
Just then a wandering lock of hair that touched
My cheek, brought back to me a simple song
I sang you long ago, of how that touch

Thrilled through me like a sudden glimpse of
God.

Do you remember, Alice? You were pleased,
And said your poet would win fame and friends.
They came through music; do you think they
count?

My life is almost ended now; I seem
Above it all, and, looking down, I see
The distant dawn of youth, whose light was
you;

And then I see the clouds that filled my sky,
The one mistake that made my day so dark;
But now at sunset, just before the night,
The clouds have broken, Alice, here with you.

Your hand is cool upon my brow; yes,
leave

It there. The fever sinks, or changes back
Again to that old fever of the Spring; —

And yet I have not thanked you that you
came,

Nor him who did not grudge this happiness
To me who missed you all the lonely years.

Alice, my eyes are growing very dim;
Perhaps my mind is wand'ring idly; yet
I would retrace with you my path of life,
Whose farthest stretch is now so close at hand.
Do you remember when our lives were young
What perfect comradeship of thought was ours?
How first the impulse stirred me to express,
By means of art, the joy we had in life,
And voice myself in music? Sometimes then
We wondered whence this impulse came, so
strong

And so mysterious: I never knew.
Then many forms I tried, and failed in each,
From song to symphony; but still we loved
Those crude attempts of thought, but inchoate,

To reach a formed expression. You would
give

Me courage to attempt again, and I
Would come to you for rest and cheer in oft
Repeated failure. Once, do you forget?
You said I'd robbed you when I burned them
all.

And then came love, and gave me of his strength
To sing more worthily of life, and you.
(Forgive me, Alice, that I bring your tears.
You know I too have wept, alone — so long.)

Then soon a subtle something came be-
tween; —

Nay, do not speak, I understand it now; —
You could not quite accept the artist soul, —
Its twilight strange of sun and shadow blent;
And then he found you. Oh, I know he gave
You many things you would have lacked with
me;

But did he understand your soul, your sweet
Imperial tenderness, your girlish dreams
I loved so well? Alas, I saw it all;
I watched you ever, though you knew it not.
I saw your eyes grow dim, the wrinkles
come, —

As, God be thanked, I shall not see again, —
And once, across a crowded concert room,
I met your look; I saw the tears; I knew
My music reached you, — led you gently back
To live again the days I dream of still.
I knew you would remember. Sometimes, then,
I thought you missed me — felt I wanted you —
And that was why we did not dare to meet.
And once — through windows open when I
passed —

I heard your voice that sang my own old
song —

Your voice that sang, then broke with sudden
tears;

And coming back, I tried my early art, —
To leave my soul expressed in words, not tones,
For you alone to see when I was gone.
The words are here, kept safe, with music too:

How long I lack your love,
With unfulfilled desire, —
 How long, how long!
My thoughts about you move
Like baffled waves of fire,
With unfulfilled desire, —
 How long, how long!

How long I yearn to fold
Your loneliness in mine, —
 How long, how long!
While life unlived grows old,
For love's fulfilment pine,
Your loneliness and mine, —
 How long, how long!

Will you not sing it sometimes all alone,
In memory of him who wrote, and loved?

But now my twilight comes and you are here,
As I have dreamed so many times you were; —
So close that there again I feel your hair.
The one last flower of all my cherished art
I long to give you, Alice, hand to hand.
It grew with tender care, through thoughtful
 years,

To hold my human longing, lack, and love —
A yearning deeper than Tschaikowsky cried
Or Chopin sang. In this I give you all; —
Our gently breathing dawn, our eager youth
Of love and light, and then the stooping clouds,
The loneliness and yearning unfulfilled,
With just this glimpse of sunset ere the night.

So take my off'ring; here, by music saved,
Our broken lives are bound at last in one;

And some in after time will understand —
Some few, who feel what music strives to say;
So down the distant years we two shall go
As oft of old, together, hand in hand.

The fire is almost out, and you are tired.
I am quite happy, Alice; can you not
Be happy too? You need not pity me;
I had you always as a young ideal,
Unaging, undistraught with life; the dawn
About you still. You must not grieve too
much.

Live bravely, Alice.

God! I loved her so!

SONGS FROM THE SILENT LAND

By LOUIS V. LEDOUX

8vo. Boards. With Frontispiece.

THE OUTLOOK

There is not so much real poetry written in this country nor so many true lovers of the art that a modest volume of verse like this can be passed by too lightly. The very refined and charming physical appearance of the book is indicative of the imagination and love of beauty which a reading of the verses discloses. Mr. Ledoux's poems strike a pure and high note.

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There is strength and a poetic appeal in all this writer's work.

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